

CHAPTER VIII LAND USE



A. INTRODUCTION

As described in Chapter III, natural features of the land provide the basis for physical planning. In this chapter, land use -- the ways in which people settle on, use and shape the land -- is described and analyzed. To a great extent, land use is the core of local planning, and therefore, the subject is central to the Master Plan. The location, size and viability of farms, residences, businesses and industries, and their relationship to each other directly affects future development potential, property values, the tax base and the character of the community. Likewise, the relationship and proximity of existing land uses to community facilities influences the ability of the Town to provide efficient and effective public services.

The type and intensity of land use in Litchfield and the Nashua Region changed dramatically over the last 50 years, as evidenced by large residential population gains and consistent regional economic expansion. While growth is expected to continue in Litchfield, changes over the last decade have been significantly slower than in the late 1970s. If the past is a guide, the highest demand for new development will be in the residential sector, although there is extensive land available in commercial and industrial zoning districts. The opening of the Manchester Airport Access Road coupled with proposed development along Pettengill Road in Londonderry, could still create additional development pressure in the northern end of Litchfield and jeopardize local farmland.

This chapter describes land use patterns in Litchfield and analyzes current standards in the zoning ordinance, subdivision and site plan review regulations. Build-out projections are summarized to examine what future development may occur based on current zoning and available land. The chapter concludes with discussion of the potential for improving zoning to promote development that is consistent with the master plan goals.

B. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Contemporary land use in Litchfield evolved out of the division of the community into land grants in the 18th century. Historical influences on land use are: the Merrimack River and the excellent farming soils in and around River floodplains, the evolution of Route 3A out of horse and carriage paths, and the proximity of Litchfield to Nashua and Manchester. It was a 1700s act by the King of England that divided Litchfield into narrow parcels that extended west to east encompassing river frontage, farmland and forests. Although sometimes difficult to identify among the more recent cookie-cutter one-acre subdivisions, many original lot lines are still evident in the parcel configurations in today's tax map.

Prior to the 1960's, the development pattern reflected the Town's north-south linear shape, with most farming, residences and community institutions concentrated along the Merrimack River and NH Route 3-A, on the Town's western edge. Since Litchfield developed in a low-density linear fashion around

farms, a distinctive village or town center with dense patterns of mixed-use development did not emerge. A new Town Hall and police station were completed in 1997 at the intersection of Liberty Way and Hillcrest Road. While no approved plan is pending, the concept of a town center in this location remains a possibility. There is adequate Town owned land to build additional facilities in this area, on the highway department and Town incinerator land nearby.

In the 1970's residential growth occurred at the Town's north and south ends as suburban extensions of Nashua and Manchester, the two largest cities in the State. Since then residential growth has occurred in central Litchfield off of Talent Road, Pinecrest Road and, more recently, off Hillcrest Road and Albuquerque Avenue. Rather than clogging the Town's only north-south arterial, NH #3A, in the 1970s the Town actively initiated steps to direct growth away from 3A, and prime farmland, through the establishment of Albuquerque Avenue. The approach was to direct residential development towards the interior of the community where there are fewer high quality agricultural soils and where the sandy soils are complementary to community development without sewers. The development of the road also provides the community with a second north/south arterial.

C. EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS

The characteristics of Litchfield's existing land use patterns are pictured in Map VIII-1 and presented in Table VIII-1. NRPC maintains existing land use data for all thirteen communities in the region. The land use data presented here was updated in 2015 and is maintained on a regular basis utilizing assessment records and direct input from town officials. To find the acreage for each land use category a query was used in Microsoft Access. Percentages were then calculated to help determine the change between land use in 2000 and 2015.

As presented in this chapter of the Master Plan, several land use categories were combined to present a generalized list of uses. Recreation and permanent open space are presented combined. Municipal facilities, such as town offices and fire department, were combined with schools to create a new category called Public Facilities. Institutional uses include churches and a library. Manufactured homes were culled out of the overall database where they are otherwise classified as single or multi-family homes. Similarly it is worth noting that the Town's age restricted housing developments are partially included within each of the single and multi-family land use groups.

The data in Table VIII-1 confirms that residential uses are a dominant feature of the landscape. With extensive residential development over the last 50 years, community character changed from rural-agricultural to more rural-residential, or suburban. In fact, past high rates of residential development consistently placed Litchfield among the fastest growing municipalities in New Hampshire. A common landscape feature is now single-family homes on approximately one or one-and-one-half acre lots. Not including developed farmland, vacant or recreation and open space lands, approximately 75%, or 4,043 acres of the developed land is within residential categories. As a result of this pattern of development, the Town has become may be referred to as a "bedroom community" from which residents commute to adjacent communities for most employment, shopping and service needs.

Laying-out Albuquerque Avenue in the 1970s enabled residential growth in the interior of the community, taking pressure off NH 3A, and hopefully assisting the retention of large contiguous farming operations in areas of prime agricultural soils. According to the 1999 NRPC inventories, active agricultural lands that are intensively cultivated constitute 1,011 acres. According to RSA 674:26, an agricultural use means land used for: agriculture, farming, dairying, pasturing, apiculture, horticulture, floriculture, silviculture, and animal and poultry husbandry. Although statistics were not compiled for the acreage covered by all of the categories within this definition, there appears to be some forested area used for silviculture.

Table VIII-1: Existing Land Use, Litchfield, 2015

Generalized Land Use	Area (Acres)	Percentage (% - All Uses)
Single Family Residential	3,653	37.4%
Two-Family Residential	274	2.8%
Multi-family Residential	72	0.7%
Manufactured Housing	43	0.4%
Commercial	86	0.9%
Industrial	419	4.3%
Public Facilities	177	1.8%
Institutional	40	0.4%
Roads and Right of Ways	510	5.2%
Utilities	69	0.7%
Vacant Land	1,835	18.8%
Permanent Open Space and Recreation	1,328	13.6%
Agricultural	1011	10.3%
Water Bodies	253	2.6%
Total	9,771	100.0%

Source: NRPC 2015

Notes: Parcels coded as mixed use were classified as commercial

The acreage of each land use category is based on NRPC data last updated in 2015

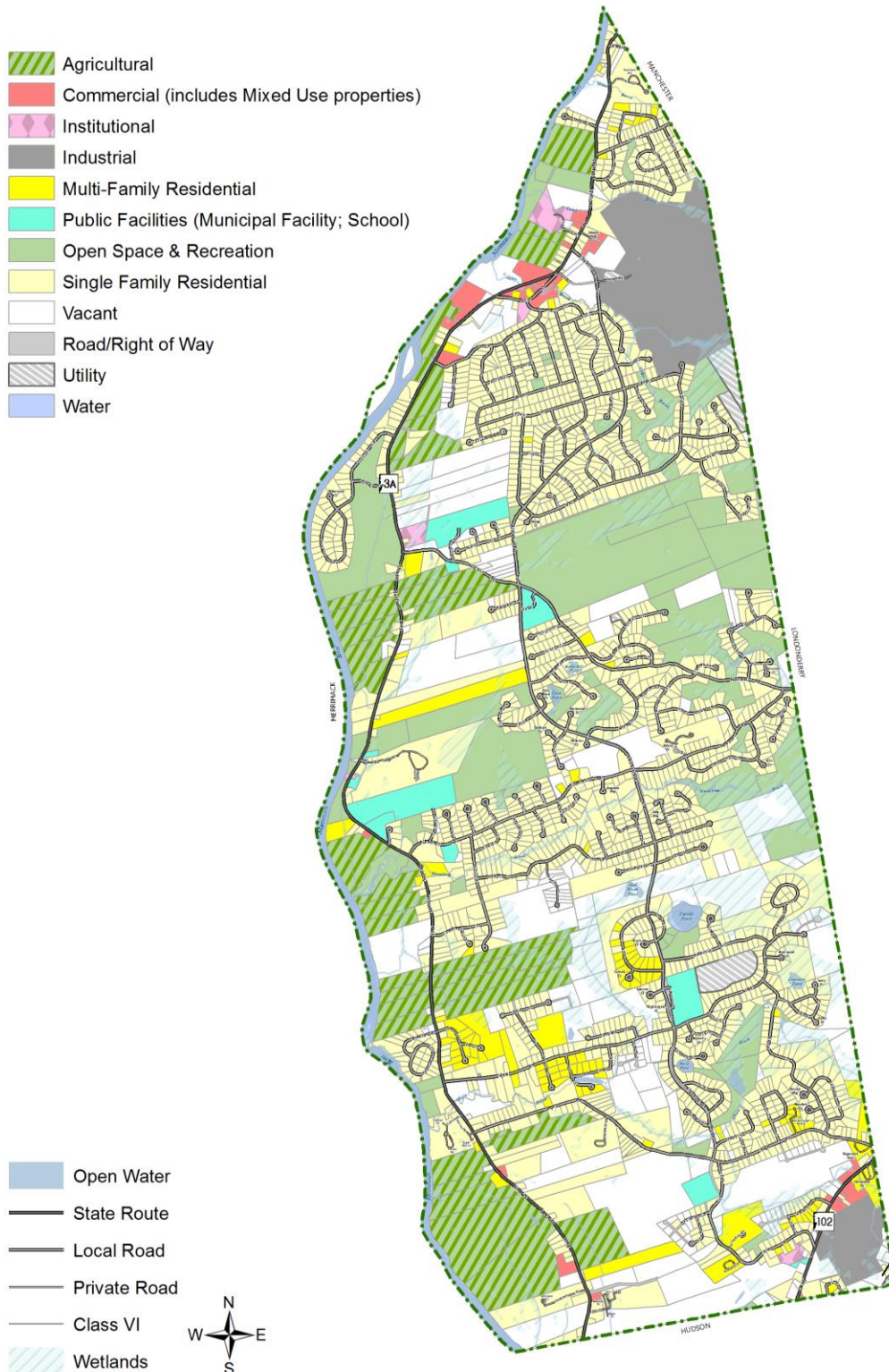
Preserving agriculture and historical resources in the community continues to be a focus of this Master Plan. While there does not appear to be an eminent threat of loss of agricultural land to new development at this time, should the economy pick up and readily developable land in the region becomes scarce, such a risk could become real. The extent to which agricultural preservation has been studied during recent years, and strategies being considered to promote conservation of agricultural resources, are discussed below. Additional discussions are ongoing regarding farmland protection and creative alternatives for the preservation of these prime agricultural soils. Current opportunities to preserve agricultural character should be a focus of the Agricultural Commission established by affirmative vote at the 2015 Town Meeting. The conservation commission also plays an important role through its land conservation efforts.

Nearly a quarter of all land area, as of 2014, was in Current Use (2,325 acres and 110 parcels). While Current Use is not a form a permanent protection of undeveloped lands, it is a tax incentive provided for land owners of farm, forest, unproductive, and wet-lands larger than 10 acres. As a unit of measurement, it helps characterize the local landscape and level of development. Comparatively, across the State as a whole, just over half of all land area is in Current Use. Within Litchfield, farms comprise nearly a third of all Current Use Lands and forests about a half. This stands in contrast to statewide totals where farmland constitutes less than seven percent and forests 86 percent of all Current Use lands.

Starting with the early agrarian history, the main commercial activities in Litchfield were predominantly farming and a few small and disperse water-powered mills. Today the mills are no longer present, but there have been gravel excavations and two golf courses sited within the community. The NH Route 102 corridor and the northern 3A corridor are the primary locations of more recent commercial development, consisting of limited retail and neighborhood commercial uses such as very small service businesses, retail stores, institutions and small offices. There are also produce stands, nurseries and pick-your-own berries at the farms on 3A as well as a small family fun park located in the north part of the corridor.

Recreational and institutional uses are scattered throughout Town. Among the main recreation assets are: Litchfield State Forest; a golf course near 3A and Hillcrest Road, a second golf course at the northern end of Albuquerque Avenue, the aforementioned fun park, and the fields and open space provided at the public and private schools.

Map VIII-I: Existing Land Use



Source: NRPC GIS Data and Analysis

Perhaps because Litchfield is situated adjacent to the largest communities in the State, there are considerable areas of utility easements that extend in both north-south and east-west configurations across the community. The regional electric transmission lines within these easements cover more than 300 acres, consisting of 69 acres owned directly by the utilities, and another 250 within utility easements. Because this land is actively maintained clear of wooded vegetation, the areas provide unique habitat for wildlife.

In terms of utilities, there is a 125-foot high cellular communications tower situated on industrial lands in the north end of Town and a 140-foot monopole cell tower along Derry Road. Due to topography and tree stands, the tower at the north end of Litchfield is not readily visible in town beyond the zone within which it is situated, although it is visible from Merrimack. Similarly, this second tower is designed such that it blends in with the surroundings and is not visually obvious. Cell towers usually rise above the forest canopy and are located on high topography; therefore, they present potential to detract from views and the visual character of communities. The Planning Board actively promotes collocation of other commercial telecommunications equipment on this tower to preserve the community's visual appearance to the greatest extent possible. If a need to locate additional tower in Litchfield is articulated, it is the objective of the community to collocate these on the existing tower and also to minimize the adverse visual impacts that such a use could present.

Other utility parcels in the community consist of well fields owned by the Town of Hudson and Managed by Pennichuck Water Works (PWW). The well parcels are on the east end of Talent Road and PWW owns three riverfront lots in the Broadview Acres subdivision on 3A.

As noted, a dominant land use feature is stand-alone single family homes on one acre lots, although there are limited areas in southern parts of Town and along 3A that contain mixtures of single family homes with higher density duplexes and apartment houses. Multi-family dwelling units (3 or more dwelling combined) represent 7.4%, or 227 of all 3,041 dwelling units that existed in the community in early 2015. Multi-family dwellings are concentrated in three distinctive settings: 1.) in buildings that are part of an apartment community with access roads for exclusive use of the residents; 2.) scattered throughout mixed residential neighborhoods with shared access roads; and 3) those housing for older persons (HOP) developments established as condominium developments. Locations such as the HOPs and some of the manufactured home parks are classified as multi-family because the land the single family structures are situated on is owned in common. The density of apartment units is somewhat high in view of the fact that none are served by public sewer or water. Pagewood Oval Apartments includes 30 units on 6.8 acres, or 4.4 units per acre. Stonehenge Apartments, off of Woodland Drive, was constructed at over 8 units per acre. While multi-family development was not permitted for many years in Litchfield, the Town adopted a Multi-Family Overlay District at the 2015 Town Meeting allowing for new development at the northern and southern ends of town.

While duplexes are permitted in the residential zone, development in the last twenty years has been minor. Duplexes represent 6.3%, or 192 units within the total housing stock. The majority of duplexes are located near Darrah Pond, along Stark Lane and around Talent Road with the remainder scattered throughout Town. Duplexes are permitted on one-and-a-half acre contiguous dry area lots.

For the decade in which the Housing for Older Persons ordinance was in effect, the town saw the construction of eight different developments throughout the town totaling 336 new housing units on 294 acres. While the ordinance allowed for the clustering of homes, creating more walkable neighborhoods, overall the developments averaged approximately one home per acre, similar to conventional single family developments, with the added feature of shared green space. The largest of these developments, Stage Crossing, encompasses 94 acres and includes 78 homes. Woodland Place, the densest of the developments, covers 12 acres and includes 23 homes, almost 2 units per acre.

The Town has 88 manufactured homes, as reported in the assessing database, within three mobile home parks in the southern end of Town. The housing density in these mobile home parks is generally higher than that which is customary for residences not serviced by public sewer or water. The Litchfield Landing Manufactured Home Park has a density of close to 4 mobile home units per acre. Parkland Estates is even denser with over 5 units per acre. Olson's Mobile Home Park has a density of less than two units per acre. The septic systems in these mobile home parks may have the potential to leach into groundwater and present contamination due to the high concentration of individual septic systems. Of critical concern is the Litchfield Landing Manufactured Home Park, which is located close to the southern Litchfield area suspected to have high potential groundwater yield.

In the 1980s, commercial and industrial zoning was expanded in an attempt to facilitate more non-residential development and also in anticipation of the Circumferential Highway construction near the southern border with Hudson. The areas of commercial zoning district added in the 1980s are segregated from residential portions of the community by a 'Transitional' zoning district in which limited commercial development is permissible. In 2013 and 2014 the Planning Board worked to further refine the commercial, industrial and transitional districts to eliminate some development barriers as well as ensure the character of development was more in line with the existing surroundings. It is a goal of the Planning Board to promote economic development in these non-residential zones, to diversify and increase the tax base and at the same time preserve the unique character of the community. The Economic Development chapter discusses the basis and details of a local economic development strategy.

Today, commercial and industrial development remains a relatively small share of the overall development pattern. Approximately 1% or 86 acres are currently used for commercial purposes and is clustered along Charles Bancroft Highway between Albuquerque Avenue and Colby Road, as well as, along Derry Road at the southern end of town. Businesses range from the small professional services to Mel's Funway. Another 4.3% or 419 acres are industrial uses, of which Litchfield Sand and Gravel constitutes 340 acres.

D. DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

Developable land analysis is a tool available to quantify the future potential for new development -- it highlights natural physical constraints to development and combines these with existing development and current zoning policies to illustrate the potential for future development. The final product is an estimation of the available Developable Land Area (DLA). DLA land is that which is not constrained from future development by natural features, wetlands, floodplain or permanent steep slopes or manmade features such as roads, utilities or existing building development. Restricted lands, such as ones containing conservation or agricultural preservation restrictions were also subtracted from the total land area to determine the future developable land area. To prepare the following developable land analysis, development constraints considered were:

1. Lands that are already developed with buildings and other physical infrastructure; and
2. Lands with physical constraints (permanent land protection and natural features):
 - a. Conservation lands;
 - b. Wetlands;
 - c. 100-year floodplain; and
 - d. Steep slopes (permanent land features, excluding excavations, with slopes greater than 25%).

Development constraints are general landscape conditions that are likely to pose a barrier to using land for new building development. These constraints are evaluated by zoning district to derive the quantity of land that remains to be developed in Litchfield. Permanent conservation lands combined with the extent of wetlands, floodplains, and the very limited areas of steep slope in the community, results in approximately 3,067 acres, or about 31% of Litchfield's land area considered undevelopable.

Table VIII-2: Constrained and Developable Land Area Litchfield, 2015

Zoning District	Total Acres	Constrained Lands			Developable Land Area		
		Developed	Conservation & Natural	Insufficient Area (<1ac)	Vacant	Agricultural	Total
Commercial/Industrial (North)	281.4	235.9	28.8	0	16.8	0.0	16.8
Commercial/Industrial (South)	302.3	98.2	5.5	0.5	145.0	53.2	198.1
Highway Commercial (Rte. 102)	310.3	151.9	44.5	5.0	108.9	0.0	108.9
Northern Commercial	363.6	124.3	112.0	1.4	79.3	46.5	125.8
Residential	7,762.9	3,757.6	2,752.0	36.0	820.0*	397.3	1,217.3*
Southwestern Commercial	418.1	50.5	91.6	0	35.6	240.4	276.1
Transitional (North)	90.1	69.9	20.2	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Transitional (South)	242.4	126.7	14.1	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	9,771.1	4,615.0	3,068.6	42.9	1,205.6*	737.4	1,943.0*

*Includes 130 acres of permitted residential subdivisions (48 homes) or multi-family developments (42 units) in various stages of completion (as of January 2017)
Source: NRPC GIS Data and Analysis

Table VIII-2 shows the total constrained and developable land area in the community broken down by zoning districts (as of 2015). While agricultural lands are in active use, they are unconstrained and are not built upon, therefore, they are by definition developable. Given the Town's desire to protect its agricultural heritage, the agricultural acres are separated from the vacant acres in table VIII-2. However, with the exception of those lands under conservation easement, the developable land area is equal to the vacant plus agricultural land.

Of the approximately 1,943 acres in Litchfield that are developable, 55% of which are truly vacant, 38% are agricultural, and 7% residentially zoned land that has been approved for development that is in various stages of completion. Further, 40 percent of the developable land is within the non-residential zoning districts and 60 percent is in residential areas. It is clear that there is significant development potential in both the residential and non-residential sector in the future.

Approximately 4,615 acres, 47%, of the Town's land has been developed with buildings and accessory uses. Due to limitations in the design the Litchfield property assessment database, it was not possible to go beyond a general analysis of constraints and land use, such as at a sub-parcel level. In other words, at this point it is not possible to assign the portion of a parcel that is developed using the electronic database. As GIS capabilities of the Town and Regional Planning Commission are expanded in the future, it should be possible to perform more precise parcel-level analysis of the buildout potential on individual lots. For this study, if a parcel demonstrated any building development, it was coded 'built'. Actually, there are many lots in the residential and non-residential zones which have some building development and which could receive significant additional building development.

"Buildout" represents the point at which all land is developed to its maximum potential under the current regulatory framework.



The following further analyzes the development potential within the Town's residential and non-residentially zoned areas. To do so, first, any unconstrained parcel fragments less than 1 acre were removed from consideration. Next, the developable land area was reduced to factor out 15 percent of the land area for future roads, public utilities, and lot irregularities. The resulting area was divided by the minimum zoning density permissible in each zone. Simplified for this rough estimate of development potential, the minimum lot size is assumed to be one acre of contiguous dry land; however, for non-residential development a minimum lot size of one acre must be approved by the Planning Board. The result was an upper-limit showing the total number of new units of development that could be achieved in each zone. It is important to understand that this is a "worst case" scenario that does not consider development constraints that may arise from oddly shaped lots or other factors such as the assignment of conservation restrictions or property owners' intentions to keep land in an undeveloped state. Rather, it is assumed that over time, with increasing demand for open land and accompanying development pressure, lots are likely to be reassembled and development opportunities maximized.

Map VIII-2: Development Constraints, 2015





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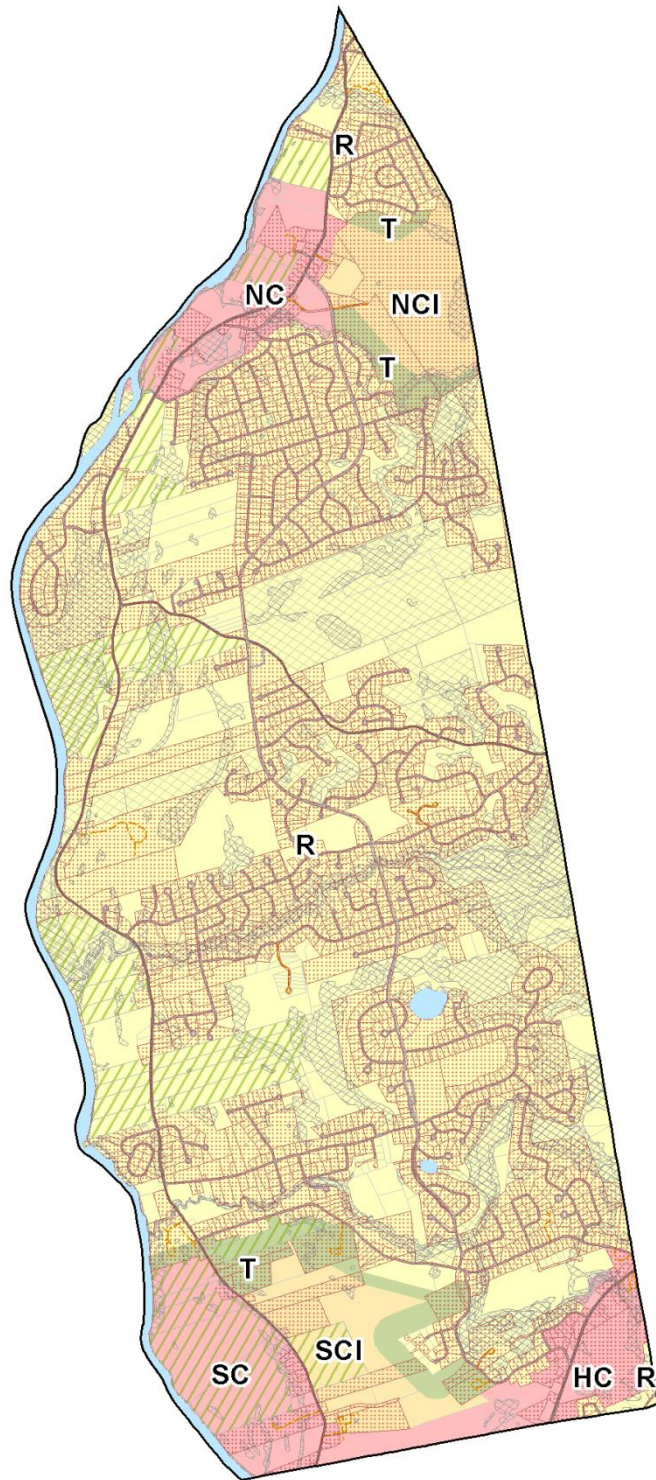
-  Undeveloped Parcels
-  Agricultural
-  Developed Parcels

Development Constraints

-  Natural Constraints
-  Conserved Land

Zoning

-  Residential [R]
-  Commercial [NC, SC, HC]
-  Commercial/Industrial [NCI, SCI]
-  Transitional (North and South) [T]



Source: NRPC GIS Data and Analysis

I. Residential Zones Developable Land Area (DLA)

Under existing zoning, there are approximately 1,217 acres of DLA in the Residential District, of which 820 are vacant, another 398 acres are agricultural, and 130 acres have permitted developments in various stages of completion. The minimum lot size for single-family residential lots is one-acre contiguous dry area. Based on a review of Assessor's data, in recent years it appears that approximately 1.4 acres of wet and dry area has been needed to configure 1-acre dry lots (the 0.4 acres would consist of land classified as constrained).

For development of this Master Plan the Planning Board decided to classify agricultural land as DLA because, aside from the potential for historic pesticide contamination, these areas probably could easily be converted to residential development. While from 1980 to 2000, there had been a consistent decline in the amount farmland due to residential development. This trend appears to have since stabilized with no notable loss of farmland to residential development since 2000, which may have been attributable to the Great Recession and near halt to residential development after 2007. Again, the Town will need to monitor this trend as undeveloped residential land becomes scarce.

Currently, there are limited local resources available to promote preservation of farmland, although in recent years there have been budget appropriations approved for land conservation. In 2014 the Conservation Commission acquired one 13 acre parcel of agricultural land. At the local level, there had been an active Farm Preservation Committee which in 2002, at the time of the previous Master Plan, was formulating strategies to preserve agricultural lands and which is also assessing which areas are of the highest utility to attempt to preserve. While that effort has since waned, residents voted at the 2015 Town Meeting to establish an Agricultural Commission. There have been numerous initiatives in Litchfield to promote awareness of the potential loss of farmland. Further, by presenting all farms as DLA, it is possible to show the development potential if no action at all is taken to conserve these resources. Attributing all farmland as potentially developable ensures that the full potential for new development is accounted for when planning for future capital needs and particularly for the estimation of impact fees.

Litchfield currently has 3,041 residential units as counted at the end of 2014 and recorded in NRPCs parcel database (generated from assessing data) and an additional 91 units permitted through subdivision and site plan applications and under development. The Town population in 2010 was estimated as 8,271 persons. The following development potential scenarios use the 2010 US Census figure of 2.92 persons per housing unit

Scenario 1: 100% Single Family Residential Development on Vacant and Agricultural Land

It is roughly estimated that at full buildout there is potential for an additional 924 residential units if all currently vacant and agricultural lands in the residential district were to be developed for single family homes. The resulting population at full buildout could range up to 10,970 persons. Given that the Town's population is projected to range between 9,300 and 9,800 by 2040, it appears there is adequate land to support anticipated growth.

Scenario 2: 100% Single Family Residential Development on Vacant Land Only

Roughly 400 acres of the DLA within the residential zoned land is currently under active agricultural use. Using the same methodology to estimate development potential, these 398 acres equate to approximately 338 of the potential 1,035 additional single family homes that could be constructed in Litchfield. Were these lands to remain agricultural or be permanently protected, there would be approximately 586 additional new single family homes with an additional population of 1,712 new persons. The buildout population under scenario 2 would therefore be decreased by 986 persons resulting in a total potential population of 9,983 persons. In this instance it is possible that by 2040 the town could approach buildout, creating additional pressure on agricultural lands or higher density development.

Scenario 3: Mix of Single- and Multi-Family Development on Vacant and Agricultural Land

One other development scenario that could be possible would be to proportionately distribute the residential DLA to create a mix of housing types. Based upon the existing ratio of land area (acres) the town is comprised of approximately 91% single family, 7% two-family and 2% multi-family. However, over the last 3-4 years 13% of the land area within residential planning board approvals (subdivision and site plan applications) has been for multi-family development. Using an approximated ratio of distributing 75% of the developable land area to single family, 10% to two-family and 15% to multi-family would result in approximately 693 new single family homes, 124 two-family units (62 duplexes), and 348 multi-family units (58+ structures), totaling 1,163 new units for approximately 3,396 persons, resulting in a total future population of 11,667 persons at full buildout. Were this scenario to come to fruition, there would be more than adequate land to support the projected 2040 population without approaching full buildout. Again, this is incorporating all agricultural lands.

Scenario 4: Mix of Single- and Multi-Family Development on Vacant Land Only

Excluding agricultural lands these figures drop to 440 new single-family homes, 78 two-family units, and 220 multi-family units, totaling 738 new dwelling units and 2,155 new residents (for a total projected possible population of 10,426 persons). Again, similar to Scenario 3, there is adequate land and development potential under Scenario 4 to support the 2040 projected population without achieving full buildout.

Potential Residential Development and Projected Population

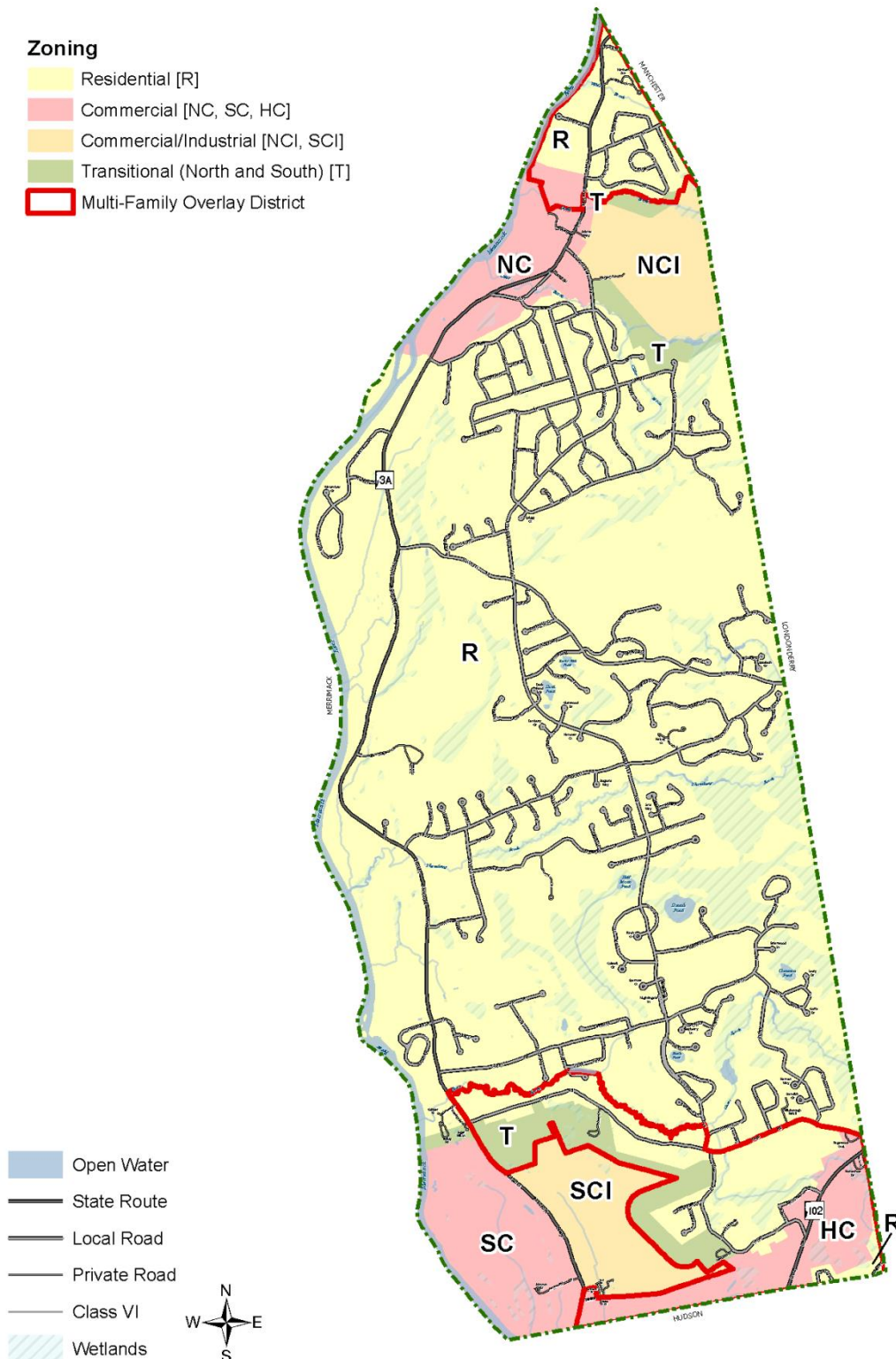
Estimates of development potential are simply that, an estimate of the potential for construction based upon current land development parameters. Litchfield, which had one of the higher regional growth rates from 2000 to 2010, only grew by 1.17% annually. Given lower in-migration levels, decreased birth rates, and an aging population growth is expected to remain relatively low. The Town's projected population in 2040 is expected to be approximately 9,760 persons. This analysis confirms there is ample land available in the community to support the projected community growth through 2040. Duplexes and multifamily homes will play a key role in mitigating demand to develop agricultural lands.

2. Non-Residential Zones Developable Land Area (DLA)

In the Commercial, Commercial/Industrial, and Transitional Districts, approximately 41%, or 834 acres of land, of all land within the non-residential zones, are suitable for future development. Of approximately 2,087 acres in Litchfield that are vacant and unconstrained, 40% are within the non-residential zoning districts. The natural constraints to development within commercial zones consist primarily of poorly drained soils, which include wetlands.

Slightly less than half, 45%, of the developable land in the non-residential zones is currently in agricultural use. In addition to natural constraints and developed area, approximately 600 acres within commercial zoning districts are classified as prime agricultural soils. Prime agricultural soils are not a constraint to development per se, but the Planning Board has identified preservation of prime agricultural soils in an open state suitable for farming as important to preserving the rural-agricultural heritage of the community. Preserving large contiguous areas of high quality farmlands is also a major land use and economic development goal. The prime agricultural soils are a unique and valuable natural resource deserving special attention in order to preserve them for future generations.

Map VIII-3: Zoning Districts, 2015



Source: NRPC GIS Data and Analysis

E. CURRENT ZONING AND LAND USE REGULATIONS

Litchfield has utilized several land use regulation methods over the years to ensure a quality built environment. In 1949, the Town adopted its first zoning ordinance in order to regulate the location and use of buildings for the purpose of promoting health, safety, morals and the general welfare of the community. The year 1957 saw the creation of a Planning Board and the adoption of a building code. Thus, the goal of the Master Plan is to promote the adoption of additional zoning and regulations that will help preserve contiguous open space and local environmental quality, including a healthy natural environment and maintenance of the agricultural base. At the same time it is a goal of this plan to foster land uses to enhance the economic base and promote fiscal stability in the local public sector.

The current zoning ordinance provides seven primary zones and three overlay zoning districts. Map VIII-3 shows the primary zoning districts along with the Multi-Family Overlay District. In Litchfield there is one residential zoning district consisting of 7,763 acres or 79 percent of all lands in Town. Another 2,008 acres, or 21 percent of all lands, are within non-residential zoning districts. There are four main non-residential zoning districts in Litchfield that cover eight locations:

1. Commercial/Industrial Service District, broken into north and south parts, with only slightly different permissible uses, totaling approximately 584 acres;
2. Commercial Districts, approximately 1,092 acres, in three distinct zoning districts:
 - a. Highway Commercial District (Route 102),
 - b. Northern Commercial District;
 - c. Southwestern Commercial (Route 3A) District; and
3. Transitional District, approximately 332 acres.

I. Residential District

The Residential District comprises 79% of the Town. This zone consists primarily of single-family homes on one-acre lots, and is subject to the majority of the Town's building activity. The data indicates the potential for another 1,662 new lots to be created under current zoning. In addition to single family lots, the main permissible uses in the zone are: duplexes on 1.5 acre lots, farming and related agricultural uses; sand and gravel excavations, home occupations, fences and utility structures less than 200 square feet. Manufactured housing is also permitted in approved Manufactured Housing Parks within Residential Manufactured Housing Districts.

Accessory Dwelling Units

Recognizing the need to provide additional housing options for aging or young adult family members, the town adopted provisions to allow for Accessory Dwelling Units in the residential district. The provisions allow a single family homeowner the ability to provide flexible housing arrangements within the existing home by creating a separate, but connected apartment. Accessory units are secondary to the primary residence and are not obvious from the outside of the home that remains single family in its character, with a single primary home entrance.

Conservation Open Space Development

Residential development in previous decades has shown moderate sensitivity to the physical characteristics of the land and its environmental features. Most developments conformed to a grid subdivision pattern, with minimal attention given to prominent natural features such as agricultural soils, ponds, tree stands, wetlands, or the Merrimack River. In many cases, these features were viewed as little more than obstacles to more intensive development, and were rarely appreciated for their scenic, recreational or natural habitat values.

In the most recent decade, the Planning Board encouraged a somewhat more sensitive approach to development, primarily by providing careful analysis of the site characteristics, the relationship of proposed development to the features of the land, and by encouraging the use of conservation easements and dedications of certain lands to the Town. In this way, a stronger degree of environmental protection is achieved and the overall quality of residential developments is enhanced. However, a continuing problem in many subdivisions is the potential for water quality deterioration due to extensive site clearance that removes high proportions of trees and other natural cover. Excessive site clearance fundamentally changes the natural systems, such as altering drainage patterns, changing the mix of vegetation and habitat, by impacting ambient air temperatures and the degree of sunlight, and by increasing water temperatures. Subdivisions that result in insufficient forest, trees, other natural cover, and open space detract from a goal of maintaining a sustainable pattern of residential development.

Protection of natural resources took a further step forward when in 2010 the Town adopted a Conservation Open Space Development requirement for new residential subdivisions larger than 20 acres. The ordinances objectives are set forth to best preserve the natural, green and rural character in balance with residential construction. The results are achieved by allowing an applicant to create the same number of new lots as they would otherwise be permitted in a conventional subdivision, however, those lots may be clustered and smaller than the minimum lot size, creating open space areas with the unused land. Ideally, the high quality natural resource lands are identified during the design review phase and are the portions of the original lot set aside and placed into conservation.

As discussed in the Natural Resources chapter, one major problem brought on by poorly designed development is the potential for water quality deterioration. In addition to the risk of improperly maintained septic systems, very large surges in demand for water during warmer weather due to demand for water to irrigate lawns is straining the capacity of the water supply network. Furthermore, since Litchfield contains urbanized areas according to the US Census definitions, the community is required to comply with the Federal stormwater permit. This EPA Non-Point Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) requires a community stormwater management plan, including strategies to ensure that contaminants are not introduced into local surface waters. Litchfield has adopted a Stormwater Management plan that promotes Best Management Practices (BMPs) to prevent pollution from entering stormwater runoff as well as outlines various outreach and education efforts to reduce the potential for contamination. Additionally, the Town has adopted a Stormwater Management Ordinance to ensure that new development does not convey detrimental off-site stormwater impacts. The continued used of open drainage and retention of more open space and natural cover are keys to realizing success in this arena. EPA is expected to release a new MS4 Stormwater Permit in 2016 that will include additional provision that the Town will need to promptly act upon following its release.

2. Non-Residential Zones

Table VIII-5 provides an overview of permitted and special exception uses allowed within the commercial zones. The non-residential zoning promotes primarily light industry and commerce, with lower land use intensity .transitional zones providing a buffer from residential zones. Industries permitted consist of warehousing, offices, manufacturing assembly and agriculture related industry. One reason that these uses are permitted is that they are somewhat less likely to adversely impact ground and surface water supplies. As discussed further below, the Town is evaluating the potential to facilitate the development of either sewers or community septic systems within these zones.

A 1988 study by the Litchfield Industrial-Commercial Development Committee examined development potential in relation to the planned Circumferential Highway, limitations of commercial and industrial zoned lands at the time, and the feasibility of extending sewer utilities into commercial zones. The study showed that 1980's real property base expansions, primarily in the residential sector, were not enabling

the public sector to keep-up with the cost of providing services. At that point, 80 percent of the property tax base was low-density single family homes and the new residential development was expensive to service. Furthermore, in the 1980s Litchfield had among the lowest taxable valuations in the region. An outcome of the 1988 study was expansion of the commercial/ industrial zones. A potential problem is that since the expansion of non-residential zones over ten years ago, there had not been a significant increase in commercial development.

In 2013 the planning board did a comprehensive review of its non-commercial zoning districts in conjunction with an outreach process that interviewed existing businesses, agricultural operators and residents. The result was an affirmation of existing permitted uses, with additional insight that allowed for slight refinement.

Since that 1988 study, the planned Circumferential Highway has proved unfeasible in its original configuration. It is however, worth continued study of whether individual portions, such as an additional bridge crossing would be feasible and yield greater development potential for the southern commercial/industrial districts. Such efforts would benefit from inter-municipal conversations between Litchfield, Merrimack, Hudson and Nashua.

Commercial Zones

The Commercial Zones are located in the Route 3A and 102 corridors. The purpose of the zone is to serve the major commercial needs and business needs of the general public. The zone comprises 1,092 acres, or roughly 11 % of the Town. The predominant land use is retail, light industrial and office.

Transitional Zone

The Transition Zone comprises approximately 332 acres, or roughly 3% of the Town. The predominant existing land uses are agriculture and residential uses. Within the transitional district single family dwelling units are permitted only as are part of mixed-use developments. The multi-family overly district does allow for multi-family in much of the transitional district. The purpose of the zone is to provide a buffer between the lower density Residential Zone and non-residential zones; therefore, permissible uses are: professional and business offices; schools and day care; churches; recreation; and agriculture.

Commercial Industrial Districts

The two commercial industrial areas, one to the north-east and the other the southwest, comprise 584 acres and 6% of the Town's area. The northern commercial industrial district is predominantly used for excavation and construction industries. The southeaster end of 3A, while zoned commercial industrial includes a mix of uses.

**Table VIII-3: Permitted & Special Exception Commercial Uses
Litchfield Zoning Ordinance, March, 2015**

Type of Land Use	Zoning Districts		
	Commercial	Transitional	Comm/Industrial
Bank & branch of financial service institutions	X		
Establishments offering goods for sale (retail)	X		
Restaurants (excluding drive-in)	X		X
Civic Centers	X		
Professional Office	X	X	X
Health care	X		
Personal services	X		
Hotels/motels / Bed and Breakfast	X		
Indoor theatres	X		
Churches and associated parsonages	X	X	
Recreational facilities and membership clubs	X	X	
Schools, nurseries and day care	X	X	
Funeral homes	X		
Research and testing labs	X		X
Mixed Use	X	X	
Agriculture	X	X	X
Utility Structures (<200 sf)	X	X	
Gasoline sales	Special Exception		Special Exception
Auto service and repair	Special Exception		Special Exception
Take-out/drive-in food	Special Exception		Special Exception
Retail sales of motor vehicles, supplies, equipment	X		Special Exception
Warehousing	X		X
Pre-manufactured equip. assembly, test, & repair			X
Wholesale			X
Computer services			X
Transportation Terminals			X
Excavation, mining and processing			X
Adult Entertainment			Special Exception
Independent Living/Older Persons Housing	X	X	

Source: Town of Litchfield Zoning Ordinance, March 2015.

3. Multi-Family Overlay District

The Planning Board developed a new overlay district that was adopted by the voters at the 2015 Town Meeting to ensure the town is in compliance with State Law. RSA 674:58-61 requires multi-family residential construction be allowed. The overlay district permits multi-family homes in the northern and southern ends of town and requires a minimum of 2 acres of land. Multi-family structures are required to be designed consistent with the town's single family character and limited to six units per building.

4. Telecommunications Ordinance

Litchfield enacted a commercial telecommunications ordinance in 1998 to guide the siting of towers in a manner that does not interfere with views from public lands, natural scenic vistas, historic buildings or major view corridors. These uses are permitted only in the Commercial/Industrial Service Districts and the Highway Commercial District, subject to Site Plan Review.

5. Sign Regulations

Preservation of the Town's rural character, respect for the Town's environment and complimenting the surrounding area's character are a key goal of the sign ordinance. The ordinance provides for district based requirements that limit sizes, materials and lighting while allowing signs to give general information, provide street advertising for business and industry.

6. Impact Fees

Impact fees will not influence the spatial layout or mix of land uses in the community. Nor will affect the pace of development. However, impact fees help off-set the cost impacts to the community associated with new development and provide the Town a revenue source to help meet the need for additional capital facilities precipitated by new growth.

7. Subdivision Regulations

The subdivision regulations set forth the rules for the division of land. Per state law, the division of a land tract in two lots constitutes subdivision. The Town has procedures that enable a less exhaustive review process for "minor subdivision", which are those involving the division of one property into three or less parcels. Subdivision regulations have been consistently updated by the Board to improve the administrative process of platting new lots, to reflect the evolution and refinement of community goals and objectives, as well as to reflect improvements in contemporary land planning methods.

The subdivision regulations require the Planning Board to conduct a comprehensive site analysis, which calls for a narrative document that identifies the natural and man-made features of areas proposed to receive development including an evaluation of: soils, trees, water bodies, rock outcroppings, other natural resources, historic landmarks, and stone walls. This process is akin to an environmental impact analysis and it also calls for examination of the potential social and fiscal impacts of proposed development. As the available DLA has decreased, land proposed for subdivision typically has been more marginal and demonstrates higher degrees of development constraints than areas developed earlier. It is a goal of the Planning Board to ensure that new development does not detract from the community character and the ecosystem. Site analysis provides a means to obtain a wide variety of necessary site information, which the Board can use to comprehensively evaluate a proposed plat to ensure that the public health and safety is protected in the proposed design.

Site Analysis is a key ingredient of the conservation design subdivision provisions in Litchfield's Zoning Ordinance. Conservation zoning is a focused approach to subdivision where open space preservation is the basis for a subdivision layout. Conservation design is a fair and reasonable process of subdivision that provides balance between the community's goal for retention of open space and rural character and private landowners' desire to realize a reasonable profit from development. Open space planning does not reduce building density; rather, this density-neutral approach applies site analysis and community resource protection goals to provide an arrangement of buildings and roads that is concentrated in areas that do not detract from the environment. In contrast with clustering, conservation design techniques preserve more open space and do not increase the overall level of development. Site analysis sets-up an examination of the natural resource suitability of a parcel and it provides insight as to where flexibility is needed in the layout of a subdivision.

8. Site Plan Review Regulations

The site plan review regulations, which derive a statutory basis from the subdivision of land RSA 674:36, provide for Planning Board review of all plans for new development or re-development of non-

residential uses and multi-family dwelling units. Procedures are also in place that enable a less exhaustive review process for 'home occupations', 'minor site plans' and farm buildings.

Like the subdivision regulations, the Board adopted site specific soil mapping requirements for site plans and requires fire department review in the plat submission requirements. Initiatives are also underway to upgrade the fee schedule and produce a site plan review checklist.

Larger municipalities in the NRPC region, such as Nashua, Merrimack and Hudson have all instituted active economic development programs and tied these to their planning and community development goals. Working with the NRPC in 1999 through 2000 the Economic Development Working Group subcommittee of the Planning Board performed analysis of the types of tools that the municipality could use to more effectively carry out local economic development functions. The process investigated methods to manage physical change and promote economic opportunities. Using the unique small town heritage of Litchfield as an organizing theme of its meetings, the group investigated how to preserve the features of the community that residents value, but to also accommodate new commercial development since well-coordinated commercial development can provide fiscal balance and enhance community appearance. Site design principles may be used to promote commercial development that is in character with rural New England community heritage. Excellence in community design can be promoted by using design standards to instruct people undertaking development on how to achieve high quality commercial projects that contribute to community character and which will help sustain the local economy. This input was used to form the non-residential Building Orientation and Design Standards adopted in 2005. The Board should consider developing similar standards for multi-family construction, given the adoption of the multi-family residential overlay district in 2015.

9. Excavation Site Plan Review Regulations

The Excavation Site Plan Review regulations govern plans for the movement of earth under the provisions of RSA 155-E. These regulations have not been altered since a recodification in 1984. The regulations should be reviewed to determine if these are still consistent with the State regulation, which changed in recent years. The Planning Board should also evaluate whether the local regulations should be upgraded to provide more controls on this type of land use and bring the policy up to date so that it reflects up-to-date methods of managing this type of using contemporary engineering and site planning techniques.

F. RECENT ZONING AND REGULATORY CHANGES

A review of the recent history of zoning amendments and updates to the Land Use Regulations indicates that townspeople generally followed the recommendations of the Planning Board. The following is a summary of major amendments that passed Town Meeting since 2000:

- Updates to the Floodplain Conservation District and adoption of new Flood Insurance Rate Maps.
- Adoption of the Multi-Family Overlay District
- Adoption of an Accessory Dwelling Units Ordinance
- Amendments to the Commercial, Transitional, and Commercial-Industrial District provisions and boundaries
- Reorganization and update of the Impact Fee Ordinance and updated methodology
- Adoption of a Conservation Open Space Development Ordinance

- Design standards for non-residential development incorporated into the Site Plan Review Regulations
- Broadened the definition of agriculture and agricultural uses to be more inclusive
- Having met the goals of the Ordinance, the Housing for Older Persons ordinance was repealed. The following developments were approved under the ordinance and are grandfathered:
 - Gilcreast Farm; Map 32, Lot 7 (48 units)
 - Stage Crossing; Map 12, Lot 17 (78 units)
 - Woodland Place; Map 2, Lot 98 (23 units)
 - Heritage Park; Map 2, Lot 86 (18 units)
 - Canberra Village; Map 14, Lot 12 (48 units)
 - Annandale on the River; Map 1, Lots 6, 7 (57 units)
 - Blossom Court; Map 4, Lot 10 (24 units)
 - Pine Creek Village; Map 23, Lot 17 (42 units)

G. NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS

While, there has been limited development since the 2002 Master Plan and particularly since the economic decline of 2007, there have been several significant projects implemented by or in the Town.

- **Albuquerque sidewalk and connections:** Thus far the multi-use biking and walking path have been completed the length of Albuquerque from Charles Bancroft Highway at the north to Page road. The southern segment needs to still be completed, connecting to Charles Bancroft/Route 3A. As part of the larger effort a gazebo was constructed along the path at town hall, providing a meeting point for residents to gather.
- **Forest and Farmland Purchased by the Conservation Commission:** The Litchfield conservation commission acquired 13 acres of farmland in 2014 in an effort to preserve rural farm character of the town in the 3A corridor and provide a means of possible public access to the Merrimack River. Additionally, in 2015 the Conservation Commission purchased 66 acres of forested land off Birch St that includes a trail system.
- **Sawmill Brook Recreation Facility:** Facility upgrades to the park include a field now in use for Pickle Ball and parking used for the biking and walking path.
- **Incinerator Retired and Recycling Center Established:** In the fall of 2010 the Town's household waste incinerator was decommissioned due to the high cost to comply with EPA emission control standards. The Town now, as of 2013, maintains a "State of the Art" transfer station and recycling facility that compacts all household waste in containers. Transportation and disposal is contracted with a private contractor and recyclable material is sent to different markets through a non-profit recycling organization, the Northeast Resource Recovery Association. In 2015 residents recycled 775 tons of waste including a range of materials from cardboard, glass and metals to cell phones, fluorescent bulbs and batteries. The center added wood, copper, oil filters and a hazardous materials collection day in 2015. Services at the facility are provided through membership in the Northeast Resource Recovery Association recycling cooperative.
- **New Pavilion and Ball Park at Darrah Pond:** The recreation commission has been regularly upgrading and implementing improvement projects at this town park. Recent improvements include painting the recreation hall interior, paving a section of the entry way, created a new and larger snack bar, built a new pavilion and installed exterior lights in front of the pavilion for the winter skating rink, and the zip line is in use behind the pavilion.
- **Airport Access Road:** In November 2011, the Manchester Airport Access Road opened. This road provides another crossing of the Merrimack River just north of Litchfield. While the primary

purpose of the road is to provide direct access to the Manchester Airport from the F. E. Everett Turnpike, it also improves access to Litchfield. NRPC is currently monitoring traffic volumes along the NH 3A in Litchfield to assess the impact/benefit of the bridge and Access Road on local traffic flow. Were an additional bridge to be constructed proximate the Merrimack, Litchfield, Nashua and Hudson town lines, traffic from the Airport Access Road would be drawn south to the new Merrimack River bridge crossing.

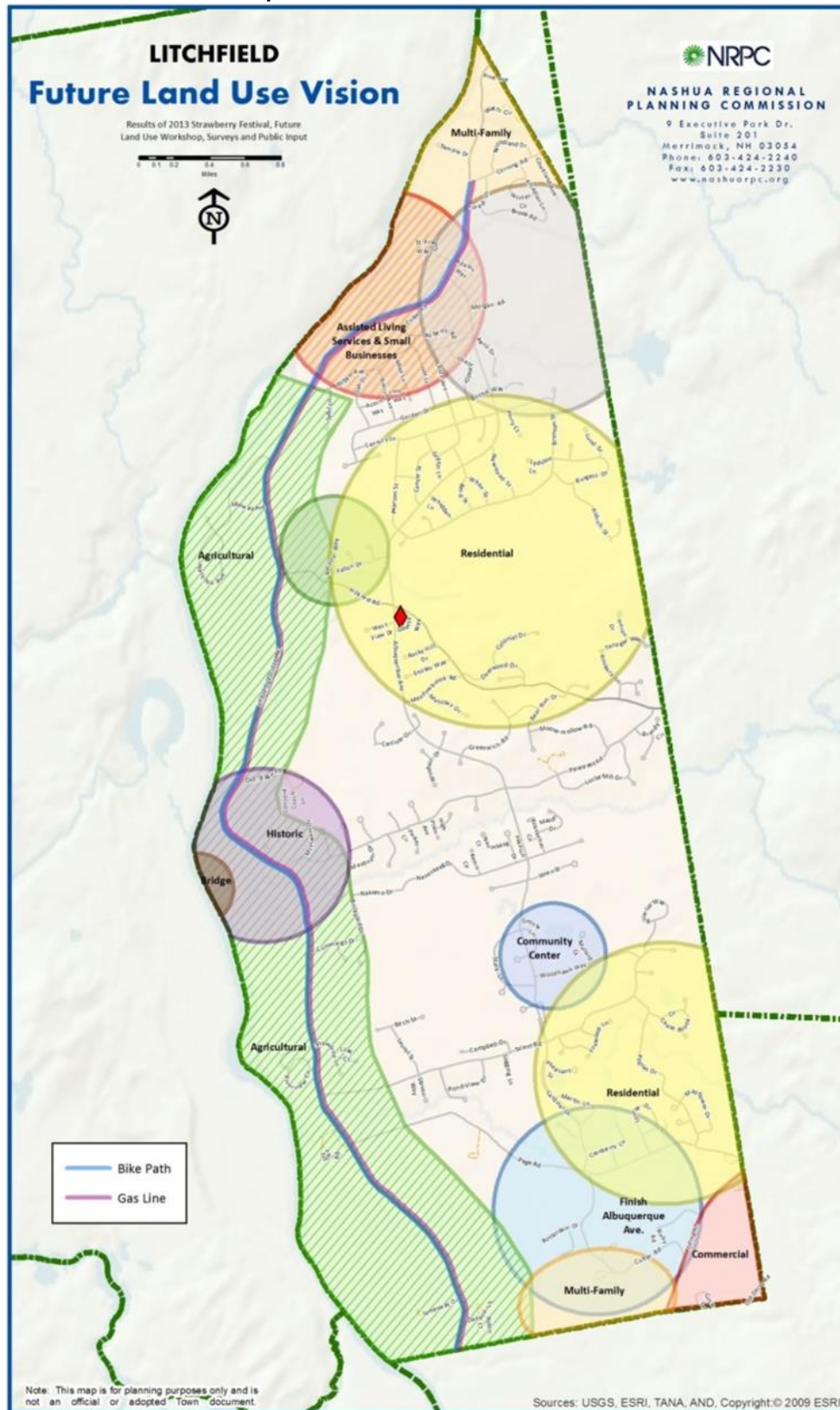
- **Wastewater Feasibility Study:** The Town commissioned a wastewater feasibility study that assessed opportunities and constraints to providing municipal sewer service to the Town's commercial zones. The study evaluated alternative technologies, different ways to configure infrastructure, connection options, and relative costs for each of the study's presented alternatives. Additionally, the study included available funding opportunities such as grants, loans and the potential for private investment. . This study was completed in December 2015.

H. FUTURE LAND USE

The development pattern established for residential development in Litchfield has worked somewhat well for the Town. Success has been obtained in directing residential growth away from prime farmlands, and when residential and non-residential growth has occurred in the 3A corridor, the Board often succeeded in minimizing adverse traffic and landscape impacts within the corridor. Problems have been the high rate of residential development, with its attendant fiscal demands and the sprawling pattern of development that consumes increasingly larger areas of land per person and per housing unit. It is also somewhat of a problem that non-residential development has not increased significantly since the Master Plan was adopted, although zoning was reformulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s to enable commercial development. Additionally, in 2014 the Planning Board revisited the Town's non-residential zoning districts to refine and balance the ordinances to remove obstacles while protecting community character.

"Smart growth" is a method or philosophy that can restore vitality to a community by recognizing the connections between development and quality of life. The features that distinguish smart growth in one community are likely to vary from those of another. Generally, smart growth invests resources in restoring community and vitality to town centers, regional centers and major urbanized areas, while protecting rural areas. It is town-centered, transit and pedestrian oriented and promotes a greater mix of accessible housing, commercial, retail and recreational uses.

Map VIII-4: Future Land Use Vision, 2013



The development pressures of being sandwiched between the states two largest cities is even more reason to incorporate the smart growth philosophy. Smart growth encourages the conservation of open space, environmental resources and the agriculture and forestry industry prevalent in rural areas. Successful communities have one thing in common; a vision of where they want to go and of what they value in their community, and their municipal master plans reflect these values.

During 2013 the Litchfield Planning Board conducted a series of outreach events and exercises with a goal of drafting amendments to the Town's Zoning and Land Use Regulations to enable commercial development and agricultural preservation in balance with one another. As part of this process, the Planning Board mapped the community's vision for future land use and development patterns to assess whether the current Zoning Map and District Boundaries are consistent with desired outcomes. The Board began by presenting residents with a map of the town broken up into eleven (11) generally homogeneous areas and asked where different land uses should be permitted in town, if at all. A total of 151 out of 192 of the 2012 Community Survey respondents answered this question.¹

Residents were very clear in the 2012 survey that they did not support mixed use development despite there being strong support for a range of uses in individual areas of town in the maps based questions, however, there was support for a variety of non-residential uses in select locations. As a result, the Board needed to follow up with residents how to further parse out the 2012 survey's future land use map results. To do so, the Board solicited input from residents to draw a series of future land use map alternatives, three of which were developed at the 2013 Future Land Use Workshop and another alternative based on input provided to the Board at the 2013 Strawberry Festival. To ensure broader resident input beyond the workshop and Strawberry Festival, the Planning Board then conducted a second online survey allowing residents to vote on the four alternatives (113 of 125 respondents voted on a future land use vision map).²

With the 2013 survey results in hand, as well as the many outreach and survey comments, the Planning Board developed a hybrid future land use map that they felt best represented the most commonly supported elements of the individual maps. Commonly cited features of the various future land use visions included:

- **Keep the majority of town residential or agricultural:** Current residents of Litchfield expressed their content with the character of the town and current land use patterns and would like to see little to no change. Residents are most concerned with maintaining the agrarian history while seeking a balance of residential and commercial development. While preserving agricultural lands is a key priority, there is not a need to plan for additional farming areas as it is already allowed in all current zones.
- **Keep the Route 3A corridor agricultural:** Keeping the west side of 3A as agricultural land for the future is extremely important to both residents and business owners in Litchfield; making the town unique to other towns in the region.
- **Allow industrial uses north of Colby Brook, south of Leech Brook and east of Albuquerque:** Future land use mapping examples provided by residents indicate new commercial and light industrial development should occur at the northern and southern ends of town closer to the larger municipalities surrounding town.
- **Create small scale commercial nodes:** The existing commercially zoned areas he intersection of Albuquerque, Colby and Charles Bancroft Highway and a second node along the Routh 102 are ideal locations for commercial nodes. The northern node along Charles Bancroft Highway could support professional offices, assisted living, and other services. The second location in Litchfield

¹ Based on Litchfield's 5,976 adults age 18+ (2010 Census), this survey had a 7% margin of error with a 95% confidence level.

² Based on that same total population, this survey had an 8.7% margin of error with a 95% confidence level.

is the Route 102 corridor and better suited to more highway commercial oriented development. Although Litchfield lies in between larger municipalities, residents are prefer smaller scaled cottage industry rather than traditional retail patterns. It has been expressed that there is need for commercial development that provides services for the town's senior and elderly population. A large number of the population is getting too old to drive; therefore conveniences that are in Litchfield instead of in surrounding towns would be beneficial to this demographic.

- **Establish a southern connection for Albuquerque Avenue:** Original plans for Albuquerque Avenue called for a connection through to the southern end of Route 3A. A second, possibly more feasible and economical, alternative would be to connect to 102. Either alternative would provide greater access for residents commuting south for work or shopping. **Enhance the existing Community Center at Darrah Pond:** The Recreation Commission has an ongoing track record for implementing regular improvements as time and resources permit. The Community Center at Darrah Pond is considered a local gem that needs regular polishing. In addition to the recent work completed and noted above, there are a few other improvements that have been identified and are on the "to-do list" including a gravel road to the snack bar, install lights inside the pavilion and add new 3 phase electrical service near the main field for lighting for night games.
- **Promote/maintain historic character at Old Stage Rd and Charles Bancroft Hwy:** The historic town center and home to the Fire Station, Griffin Memorial School at the southernmost segment of Charles Bancroft Hwy is part of the quintessential small town agricultural feel along Route 3A that is cherished by residents and local businesses. Maintaining the character of the area was seen as a priority.
- **Conserve additional areas in Town:** While opinions were mixed, the majority felt the best way to preserve agricultural lands and the rural character of the town was through conservation easements rather than additional regulations. However, some farms were concerned that easements limit options for future generations. The town could develop a strategic plan to identify priority locations and interested landowners. The challenge to doing so however is there is limited, to no, investment at the state level to preserve farmland in Southern New Hampshire.
- **Add a bridge crossing:** An additional bridge crossing could render Litchfield's commercial and industrial zoning districts more viable and provide a more direct route for residents to commute to work. While the construction of a bridge cannot escape some environmental impacts, it has far less impact of the natural and built environment that the originally conceived Circumferential Highway. While the traffic forecasts indicate that a new bridge would have traffic reductions on the Taylor Falls/Veterans Memorial Bridges and through downtown Nashua and Hudson, there would be increased traffic on NH 3A in Litchfield, DW Highway in Merrimack and Concorde Street and Henri Burque Highway in Nashua.
- **Multi-purpose Path Improvements:** The existing multipurpose bicycle and pedestrian path along Albuquerque Avenue has been a very successful improvement and widely used. Residents would like to see that path completed to connect to Route 3A. Additionally, there is strong interest in creating a similar path along Route 3A creating a loop through Litchfield. Current travel conditions along Route 3A are dangerous for bicyclists and pedestrians. Along with extended pathway length in Town, dedicated areas for parking along the path should be created for those that do not live directly adjacent to the path. The Sawmill Brook Recreation Path and Town Offices provide ideal locations for small events or food vendors to provide destinations and gathering points along the path.
- **Natural Gas Distribution Line:** Currently there is natural gas available to residents in the Route 102- Cutler Road area as well as the northern most end of town. Residents would like to see the distribution lines extended to expand availability for residents and businesses.

- **River Access:** There has been increased resident interest expressed in establishing access to the Merrimack River in Litchfield. Currently the banks are too steep where there is access and residents can't get down to the river. The Planning Board would like to pursue grant opportunities and meet with the conservation commission to establish accessible public river access with a boat launch.

Additionally, during 2016 residents independently conducted a series of surveys about the town of Litchfield. The major findings revealed that citizens were very interested in the themes of recreation, conservation, integrated trail systems, and beautification. The top five items in terms of votes received was 1) creating river access, 2) creating a trail to connect the bike path to library, 3) installing a playground at the tennis courts, 4) protecting farmland, and 5) cleaning up Darrah Pond Beach.

I. Concerns and Challenges

The primary concern to both residents and business owners in Litchfield was losing the rural character of town. Big box stores are not the type of commercial development the residents of Litchfield want. While residents thought a gas station would be convenient, they are concerned about a leak at some point that could harm the underground water resources. Increase in traffic levels are also a concern for Litchfield. Much of the community does not want traffic to increase, especially along 3A. Residents are very concerned that the development of new commercial areas in town would cause their taxes to increase. According to the residents the taxes of Litchfield are already relatively high and an increase would put a lot of people in a difficult position. Many of the towns local businesses expressed concern that the current zoning, specifically the transitional zones make it very difficult for business owners to develop or grow their business. The few businesses in Litchfield suffer from the lack of development in the area and struggle to stay open throughout the year, especially in the winter.

2. Opportunities

Through the outreach efforts of the planning board and the participation from local residents, several areas emerged as potential opportunities to fulfill the community's vision. Strongest of which is to maintain the agrarian, small town atmosphere. Currently the town boasts several small family farms and large tracts of forested parcels. Litchfield harbors some of the best agricultural soil in the state and soil health is a top priority. While residents were clear that they would like to remain a largely agricultural and residential community, there was general consensus that small scale mom and pop or cottage industry type development would be nice. While the economic viability of such development is questionable there are many small fixes to the existing ordinances such as clarifying language, adjusting frontage requirements, and requiring buffers that would make such development more feasible while protecting community character.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planning Board proposes to consider and implement the following items over the next five years:

- Develop a Community Design Master Plan chapter that sets a baseline for local character and lays out a strategy to mitigate the visual impacts of projected growth and reaching community buildout.
- Advance wellhead protection. In terms of zoning, the Board should initiate studies to quantify aquifer potentials and characterize the recharge zones. The Board should also advocate for establishing a stormwater runoff performance regulation under Section 403.00 (Performance Standards). Links should be provided to the site plan regulations and Appendix D - Model Erosion and Sediment Control Regulations which reference documents that the Board has adopted to define

which Best Management Practices (BMPs) are applicable to specific land uses, such as service stations, research and testing labs, transportation terminals and excavations operations.

- Provide a strategy for adopting a town center zoning district within the next three to eight years. This multi-year process would investigate which specific zoning criteria the Board should support, including density, mix of permissible uses, and the potential boundaries and location of a village zone. This project should start small and promote the phased implementation of such a zone, with incremental additions to the zone, like new tree rings, that are adopted upon initial success. A first step might include the addition of a fire station at the current Town Offices. Another small scale incremental step could include more simple concepts to enable dedicated areas for gathering points. This could be accomplished initially with a seasonal venue such as an ice cream stand or eventually permanent with a cafe should the market conditions be favorable. The demand for town center zoning, is evident from 1998 Community Profile proceedings, where many residents articulated a need for community-building enterprise. A town-center would establish central place for social and commercial interaction, providing the potential to physically concentrate commercial, institutional and residential uses like in traditional New England villages. The Board may also investigate the use of transfer of development rights, off-site land dedication, or fee dedications in lieu of actual property donation as tools to achieve both a dense village-like environment and large areas of protected open space community-wide.
- The 2016 resident independent surveys expressed interest in setting aside a small budget to make low cost, highly-visible improvements to the town.
- Pursue grant opportunities and meet with the Conservation Commission to establish accessible public access to the Merrimack River including a boat launch.

It is also recommended that the Planning Board investigate the following innovative land use controls and other initiatives as potential tools to preserve community character, support and protect agriculture and historic resources, carefully direct new development and promote public health and well being.

- Encourage the institution of transfer of development rights or lot size averaging to help achieve farmland preservation and provide incentive mechanisms necessary to help establish market conditions that will result in the development of village-scale mixed use style development within limited areas of the community.
- Have a dialogue with the area communities, the NRPC, the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, State officials and other stakeholders to establish regional-level collaboration to achieve common goals relative to growth and open space protection and mitigate impacts on neighbors.
- Improve communications with other local boards and regional organizations. For example, the Planning Board is actively working to improve the flow of information between the Board, new applicants and the Lower Merrimack River Local Advisory Committee to ensure the Committee has adequate time to review new development applications that may be within 250 feet of the river corridor.
- Cul-de-sacs are not only a more expensive form of development, they are also more expensive to maintain. The planning board could research incentives for creating through connections and improving road connectivity.
- Research opportunities to rethink lot sizes, enable smaller lots, and ensure starter sized homes are more feasible.
- Consider form-based zoning codes in order to shift the emphasis from what can't be done to what development should look like and fit into its environs.

- Consider joining or working with a regional land trust to prioritize land conservation efforts and support easement monitoring.
- Identify locations to improve access to rivers and streams for fishing, boating and swimming.
- Work with the Board of Selectmen and CIP Committee to identify opportunities to meet local capital facility needs including: a new Town Library and expanded fire station(s). A 2016 feasibility study will look at the costs to upgrade and expand the existing fire station to meet current needs and codes. This will provide a comparative basis to assess cost effectiveness of either retrofitting the existing facility or building a new station co-located with the current Town Offices and Police Station. A more robust town center and colocation of municipal facilities might provide adequate traffic to support a business or two at the town center.
- Develop multi-family design guidelines to be incorporated into the Site Plan Review Regulations. With the adoption of the multi-family overlay district, potential applicants could benefit from having advance guidance on design expectations. The board would like to see any future multi-family development blend with the surrounding community and fit with the local agricultural and single family residential character of the town.
- Identify ways to improve the pedestrian environment in commercially zoned nodes. For example, the commercial district at 3A and Albuquerque can be accessed via the trail on Albuquerque, but there is no infrastructure for walking within the district and crossing 3A. The addition of such infrastructure would create destination points along the well used Albuquerque trail.
- Similarly, creating a small village commercial node near the town offices would create another destination point for residents that live off of Albuquerque and those that regularly walk or bike along the trail.
- Consider extending sidewalks to connect the schools to Albuquerque as well – along Pinecrest, between McElwain Drive and Albuquerque, and other strategic locations as appropriate.
- Research historic property demolition review options to ensure an opportunity to catalogue historic sites and to ensure the public can provide input and testimony before a structure is lost.

J. CONCLUSION

The lull in development over the last 10-years or so has allowed the Planning Board time to make significant strides toward implementation of the 2002 Master Plan. That said many of the same land use objectives hold true today – a strong desire to maintain the agricultural character and to balance natural resource protection with future growth and development. Litchfield has utilized many traditional as well as innovative land use controls to manage the pace and fiscal impacts of development and should be well situated should the pace of growth and development increase or return to prior levels.